

THE SMASH IN THE EAR--By George Randolph Chester

THE sleepiest town on the map was Winburg. Year after year the same old horse ears jangled their lazy way down Main street, the same old city officials were elected and the same old stores sold the same old goods to the same old customers. On Saturday night from June to September there was a band concert in Hero Square. People in Winburg grew up and became well to do in their several stations and waxed fat around the belly and died and were buried in the same old cemetery. It was a nice town, with its mossy graystone buildings, its modest spires, and its wide straight streets, shaded by tall elms and oaks; but it, too, seemed to have waxed fat as it grayed with the years; and in the fulness of time it might be expected to fold its plump hands on its plump stomach and placidly close its eyes and be decently interred as became its wealth and rank.

One bright summer day something happened to Winburg. Sam and Ruth Arnold came home on a visit! For two weeks they revelled in the blissful peace and the picturesque beauty of the place, and then the habit of intense activity began to reassert itself.

There came an accidental hour when there were no relatives or neighbors at hand and Sam found his best friend sitting on the back porch settee with her hands folded in her lap, gazing somberly down the hill at Winburg.

"Well, Ginger, what's the verdict on the old home town?" he asked, bending over her with that cordial familiarity which spoke of unmarred companionship.

"Ginger," Ruth flashed up at him, the dimples springing into her velvety cheeks, and she made room for him on the settee, where the sun glistened with apparent delight on their hair. Both were frankly red headed. The difference was that he was blue eyed and she black eyed, and that Sam had freckles on his nose. "There's no place to go except the cemetery," she added; "and the only excitement they've had this year was a cat fight."

"It's a beautiful burg," Sam looked down over the lazy city, its quaint old houses almost hidden in the green, and the shining river curving round it. At the bend the arches of the old graystone bridge cast their long white ovals on the water. "All it needs to make it perfect is about everything from a wave of crime to practical streets."

"Can't we give it a jolt and wake it up?" Ruth suggested, selecting a perfectly good red hair to pull out. The home visit was getting on their nerves. "The Angel Gabriel will need a megaphone to wake Winburg. The town has the sleeping sickness."

"I wonder why? It's the richest city in the State."

"Yes, but every citizen carries the exact change for a 2 cent newspaper. Winburg needs a smash in the ear."

"Let's do it," Ruth suddenly cocked her head on one side, and her lips parted in a smile of joy. "I smell cookies!" and she was gone in a flash.

"I'm going to shock you stiff," he said as she returned with a plateful of

and President Frazier reached hastily for his spectacles again. "Why, do you know how much that would cost this city?"

"Four or five million."

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"To scare the town awake!" Winburg hasn't a cent of bonded indebtedness, and when a town gets to that point, it's ready for the coroner. Put five million dollars in circulation and everybody will have money. Real estate will experience a boom, and that's why I'm here talking to you."

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Finally Sam left him, gasping for air, red in the face, and with every tiny wrinkle puckered into him like a scaple. Ruth was at the gate to meet the promoter when he came home, and she was quivering with anxiety to ask him all about it; but when he took off his hat, and she saw the peculiar kink of his stiff red hair, she knew the worst.

"Won't somebody else do?" she helpfully suggested.

There was a red head amid the green leaves of the big apple tree back of the house and there was a red head in the hammock just below the tree. Ruth Arnold, in a white linen frock, was swinging contentedly and embroidering daisies on a scarf. Sam, smoking a savage looking pipe up among the boughs, was spending the morning in profound cogitation; for he had seen six other local capitalists since his interview with Henry Frazier, and they had all been amused. Now it was time to think. He liked to have his wife near him while he "trussed."

"Well, Ginger, there isn't a man in this town with an imagination which will stretch further than one thousand dollars," he told her. "I see I'll have to fall back on oratory."

The dimples flashed into her cheeks and she giggled. That was all; she just giggled.

"You never heard me make a fancy speech," he indignantly declared. "When I talk about money I'm eloquent!" If I can't get these investors to organize before the City Council

done. Sam kissed her dutifully when he started down town.

When he returned he kissed her apologetically.

"Well, Ginger, I made that speech to-night," he informed her, with deceptive cheerfulness. She suppressed her giggle, while he led her around the house to the hammock. The moon was shining brightly over the placid city of Winburg and striking sapphire glints from the winding river. "Beautiful evening," he nonchalantly observed.

The giggle began to break loose.

"Have it out," he cordially invited her. Have a good laugh. Everybody does."

Still laughing, she snuggled close to him in the hammock. "Now I guess they got the smash in the ear," she judged.

"A crook would make them beg for this speedway," he savagely declared, reaching for his pipe.

"Crooks are smart, aren't they, Sam?"

"Shake, pal," he said, coming out of deep thought. "I have the smash."

John Ferret was a long, lean farmer, with a high forehead and a thin nose and self-focusing eyes. There were three men at work in his fields, but John himself was astride one of the harrows when Sam Arnold added his red hair to the landscape.

"Would you like to sell your river road land, Mr. Ferret?" called Sam, waiting for the harrow to make the turn near the fence.

"Whoa!" yelled the farmer, and tossing the lines over the backs of his thick rumped horses he strode over and leaned his sinewy arms on the rail.

"What did you say?"

"Would you like to sell your river road land?"

There was a snap in the self-focusing eyes.

"Would you like to buy it?"

hay hook. "Now, Sammy, why do you want my river road land?"

Leaning on the fence, and talking as friend to friend, Sam explained his entire speedway project with glowing enthusiasm, even admitting that he hoped to make a large profit from it himself.

"What's your proposition?"

"What's your land worth?"

"Five hundred an acre."

"I'll get you six if you'll give me an exclusive six months contract to sell it for you on 5 per cent. commission."

Ferret put a clay laden boot on the second rail of the fence, and, with a stiff thumb pushed small pieces of bark from the top rail.

"Reckon I'd better stay out till the speedway's built," he considered.

"No, you don't, John!" laughed Sam. He knew the exact moment to clap a man on the shoulder. "I'm too old a bird in the promoting game to put my foot in the lime. If all you fellows



Sam took Mr. Tinbury by the wrist and led him four feet from where they were then standing, as if the new spot were more secretive.

"Well," considered Frazier, polishing his spectacles nervously. "I'd rather pay par for a sure thing than seventy-five for a speculation."

A red streak flashed out from the house to meet Sam at the gate. The black eyes of Ruth were snapping at Sam swung her from the ground and set her down again.

"You have just kissed a president," she easily told him, as arm in arm they made for the back porch.

"President Ginger of the Winburg Civic Art League!" he laughed. "Im-mense!"

"Hasty work, wasn't it, Sam?" she exclaimed. "It has only been three weeks since I proposed the idea of an art league to Mollie Stanton, and we organized this afternoon. We've started a campaign against the hitching posts in Main street."

"What did they think of the speedway?" inquired Sam anxiously.

"Why, I kept that as my most precious secret," and there was infantile blindness in her round black eyes.

Sam studied her a moment in surprise, and then he grinned. "The smash in the ear don't work with the ladies, eh?" he guessed, as he fixed the cushions in her end of the porch settee.

"Indeed, no," she dimpled. "Winburg's women have been kept from wanting anything for so long that they must be developed gradually. I think it will take me about two weeks to make them dare to imagine the speedway."

"Then that's off my mind," and Sam, with a stretch of his tall body and long arms, dragged down his bulldog pipe from under the porch rafter. Ginger, who is there in this town that has five thousand dollars and is a hopeless fool?"

"Charlie Tinbury!" The answer was explosive, it came so promptly and it ended in a giggle.

"Good-by," and Sam reached for his hat.

"What are you going to do to Charlie?"

"Make him lucky. I've come to the point now where I need money for incorporating, advertising and a red carpeted office with a mahogany desk and two brass cuspidors."

"I can't understand that," puzzled Ruth.

"It's because you can't hand a wise man as big a profit as you can a wimp," grinned Sam, and kissed her good-by.

He found Charlie Tinbury in the billiard room of the Hotel Winburg solemnly playing billiards with himself and keeping the score on alternate strings.

"Why, hello, old chap!" hailed Sam with all the effusive cordiality of a confidence man. "I've been hunting for you everywhere."

Charlie Tinbury smiled with pea eyed gratification. It was something to be hunted for everywhere!

"Thanks, old chap," he returned in an astounding bass voice considering his thin chest. "Have a drink?"

"I'm too busy, Charlie," refused Sam, and taking Mr. Tinbury by the wrist he led him four feet from where they were then standing, as if the new spot were more secretive.

"Charlie, I'm organizing the most progressive company which was ever floated in Winburg. Now, you're a live young business man!"

Charlie blinked and pulled at his fuzzy mustache. He seemed to have an eternal hope that if he pulled persistently enough he might stretch that mustache into flamboyant luxuriance.

"Yes," he granted. His sole business in life was to evade the tannery his father had left him.

"That's the reason I came to you! You'll appreciate a good sporting proposition! This company is for a million dollars! If you'll take twenty-five thousand dollars worth of stock in advance of incorporation I'll let you have it for 20 per cent. five thousand dollars!"

Charlie knitted his brows in severe thought and plucked at both sides of his fuzz.

"Suppose the company falls through?"

"Then you'll lose like a good little sport!" and Sam slapped him on the shoulder. "But you won't lose, Charlie. I've told you the conditions; now I'll tell you the scheme. You run your own car, don't you?"

Charlie smiled until his eyes themselves seemed to pucker. "I have the only six cylinder automobile in this county!"

"And no place to run it!" Sam took off his hat and thrust his fingers through his red pompadour. He drew Charlie impulsively to a chair beside him. "Oh, you'll like this!" and then there he painted that auto speedway, every inch. He not only painted it; he built it.

"And you may be one of the incorporators, my boy!" concluded Sam, gripping the wrist of Charlie with enthusiasm. "Understand, one of the incorporators!"

"When would you want the money?" gasped Charlie. The speed had made him breathless.

"Now!" and Sam jumped up. "You bank at the Winburg National, don't you? I have one of their check books in my pocket if you haven't your book with you. Here's a fountain pen."

Half an hour later Sam was uncovering his red hair in Frazier's office and illuminating the dingy old room with his cheerful grin. Frazier began polishing his spectacles as soon as he saw Sam.

"I suppose you've brought your stock subscription list," he observed with an attempt at banter.

"Not for your signature. You're too late to get in on the ground floor. I've another proposition for you. Next week we open the books of the Speedway Improvement Company to popular subscription, in \$10 shares. Will the Merchants and Manufacturers Bank become the custodian of the funds received for the stock, these funds to remain on deposit, at interest, until the company is completed and the speedway appropriation is voted?"

President Frazier put on his spectacles and pondered deeply, and as he pondered his thin lips puckered into a wrinkled smile.

"There seems to be no flaw in that proposition," he admitted.

"Flaw?" and Sam caged his hair with his hat. "If it was an apple you'd eat it!"

The new speedway! Placid old Winburg awoke with a shock to the consideration of that mighty project, and the awakening was distressing. Winburg did not want anything. It did not want to want anything. It had dwelt in fat content for a hundred years amid its gray stones and its moss, its oaks and its elms. Young Winburg had been active, ambitious, aggressive; middle aged Winburg had been prosperous, thrifty, proud; old Winburg, heavy with its goods and chattels, and sleek with its honors, wished for nothing but to sit in the sun. Now, all at once, it was asked to get up and dance and be young again; to start life all over.

Who wanted the new speedway? And what was it? A broad, macadamized roadway to stretch straight out Maple avenue, with expensive electric lights blazing, ten miles into the country. Why, it was proposed to have those big pearl like globes glow all night long! Who'd use them after 9 o'clock? Who?

That matter of the electric lights was the one thing which Winburg could not comprehend; but it was the one thing which kept the topic alive to agitated discussion. The flowered and shrubbed parkway, the monuments, the fountains, the beautiful views, all these fell within the reach of the imagination, though in an unreal sort of way; but Winburg could not grasp the amazing thought of those thousands of electric lights blazing all night away out there in the country!

Alas for the peace of Winburg! She had within her citizenry one class of mackintoshes of whose existence she had never been aware. All Winburg's bright and ambitious young men had moved away shortly after they began to shave, but Winburg's bright and ambitious young women had been compelled to stay at home. It was these whom Ruth Arnold, with fully as much sympathy as calculation, gathered into the Winburg Civic Art League, and it was these who saw immediately and with almost tearful gratitude the joy of those thousands of electric lights burning all through the night away out in the country. They saw at once that the retiring hour of Winburg would change from 9 P. M. to 1 A. M.

With the eyes of romance they fashioned new programmes for the evenings which were now so dull—a smooth spin in the cool night air, over roads so even that it was like being wafted in a swift

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"Guilty," Ruth flashed up at him.



Pres. Frazier sat up, wiped his eyes, put on his spectacles and reached for the papers. It was Sam's turn to smile. "I thought the mention of money would sober you," he said.

agrees to spend that five millions I'll have to go after the City Council."

Ruth picked up her scarf and studied a petal in one of the daisies. "Do I know any members of the present City Council?"

"Same old trustees," and Sam's brows knitted. "Held in office because they're honest, and the way they keep from making mistakes is never to do anything."

"Don't Sam," she interrupted. "I see all the drivers of Winburg's funeral. About what could you make a speech to them?"

"Civic progress!" announced Sam defiantly.

There was a shriek from Ruth. She threw back her head and laughed almost as heartily as Henry Frazier had

don't come in there'll be no speedway. Six hundred's a big price for the land, and you know it. You're getting part of the boom in advance. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose. Now sign this contract."

Again Sam Arnold followed his shining freckles into the president's office of the Merchants and Manufacturers' Bank. Henry Frazier took off his spectacles at the sight of him and leaned back his head to laugh. Sam slammed his hat on the old carved desk, and his red hair seemed to fairly spring up as if angry with confinement.

"I'll have them digging on that speedway before next spring," he declared, and he threw back his head again.

"It was a highly humorous occasion," said Sam dryly. "One day I'm going to hold another session with those caked officials and do all the laughing myself. Frazier, here is control of 90 per cent. of the property along the speedway. It represents real estate commissions for me of over fifty thousand dollars as soon as you help me organize the Speedway Improvement Company."

President Frazier's wrinkles immediately relaxed. He sat up, wiped his eyes, put on his spectacles and reached for the papers.

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Frazier paid no attention to him. He examined three or four of the contracts and estimated the weight of the balance.

"No, I'm Sam Arnold, son of Gil Arnold."

"Oh, yes! Why, hello, Sammy! Funny I'd forgot that hair, but I didn't know you since you've grown up," and then there John Ferret gave a demonstration of why no stranger would ever waken Winburg. He looked into the clear eyes of Sam, and saw there the same blueness of Gil's; and Gil Arnold was a trustworthy man! Ferret shook hands with a grip like a

"No," promptly returned Sam, with that laugh which displayed his even white teeth and rounded his cheeks and set the freckles on his nose into acute prominence. "I'm incubating a buyer for it."

Ferret studied the young man shrewdly.

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cookies. "How would you like to settle down in Winburg?"

Ruth nearly lost her breath, but she was calm in all emergencies. She studied her husband soberly. He had an extraordinary scent for profit, a genius for promotion, a talent for quick operation. "Why?" she asked.

"To restore the old town to the face of nature! We can make it stay up until after midnight! We can give it dress suits, and gowns cut lower than the chin! We can force it to exercise its money! Ginger, the town's full of opportunities!" He tilted back her head and gazed into the depths of her black eyes. "Suppose we stay and start Winburg up an alley with an alarm clock tied to its tail?"

"Why, it's Sam Arnold!" President Frazier of the Merchants and Manufacturers' Bank looked up with a puckered smile of welcome on his lips. There were a hundred tiny wrinkles on his face, and each wrinkle seemed to push in at the ends. "Back for a visit with the home folks?"

"No, I think I'll stay and promote a little," cheerfully announced Sam. "Winburg is fat with opportunities."

"Winburg is mighty conservative," boasted Frazier, rubbing his bald spot with the palm of his incurving hand.

"Well, cure that disease," said Sam briskly. "We'll have to make a spendthrift of the town. I want to circle the city with an auto speedway lined with flowers and fountains and monuments so that the local joy riders can be taken to park, from dusky eve to dewy morn, with electric lights blazing all the way. Well--"

"Sam, what are you talking about?"

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